

threat hostages

Wed 12 April 1988

Uncle Dan Reads the Funnies
Reading the News

Sometimes, as when the setting sun hits all the windows of the high-rise buildings at the same moment and the skyline blazes, all the main stories and several minor ones on a particular day seem to be revealing the same theme, despite great disparities in place and ostensible subject. Messages between the lines suddenly appear in enlarged type. Meanings emerge. The news, from several continents, is for once coherent. Many stories form one story.

This was true on Sunday, April 10, 1988. The dialog with the hijackers of a Kuwaiti airliner in Cyprus; US attempts to oust Noriega in Panama; conflict over a germ warfare laboratory in Utah; Nixon's lessons from Vietnam; demonstrations and martial law in Honduras; Bush on coexistence with the Soviets; Shamir on (non-)coexistence with the PLO; negotiations between the contras and the US, and US and Sandinistas; America's global war on drugs (NYT); Pakistan/Afgan explosion, and SU-US negotiations on Afghan; Afghan rebels down civil airliner; Tirza case, Israeli settlers vs. Army; Weisner on 25th anniversary of PTB; Roy Cohn biographies; Iraqi gas warfare; the war of cities, Iran-Iraq. Ed on Missouri in SF (need for jobs); jobs for drugs, NYT series and Matta case in Honduras (devil's bargains).

Issues: terrorism, blackmail; relations with "evil enemies"; priorities, among "evils," and between "lesser" evils and what is (privately) considered worse (Panama; Cuba II; VN 69; Honduras; drugs in general;); denial (drugs; also, see Roy Cohn and Mafia attitudes towards his gayness). Above all, role of hostages, and killing of hostages as part of a coercive process. (and see Panama people as hostages, "as in strategic bombing" (SFE). The self-perceived rights of superpowers; the options they--and their lesser clients--regard as available to them for coercion. The "right to exist," legitimacy, of Israel; PLO, Palestinians; Sandinista regime; Soviet Union; significance of this to negotiations.

We are all hostages; and from time to time they have to kill some of us.

"They"? One or another of the rival hijackers aboard Spaceship Earth. ("How would you like to be on a plane with two competing teams of hijackers?" That is the human situation.)

"Have to?" To strengthen the credibility of their threats to kill others, to kill more, to kill those that leaders of other gangs really care about, to kill enough to cause revolt against the leadership of other gangs, or to kill all of us and themselves. Thus, to maintain, or to change a status quo; to win their demands, or block those of others: who will also kill....

threat/coercion.1

things worse than death
things worse than war
things worse than nuclear war

fear of pain (not accounted for in "determined up to linear transformation") 0

Harff finding: students more "appalled" by killing by torture than by clean death; or of starvation of poor.

good cop bad cop

beyond coercion: the control of alternatives, of attention/awareness, of calculation vs. unquestioning obedience 0

rational but uncalculating (obedient, loyal), non-autonomous

0 "rational choice" as a myth of autonomy, freedom

Movies on coercion: a) 'Above the Law: chemical interrogation; torture (I'll cut your feet off and dump them over there);

b) I'll tell you everything; I know you will, my dear

c) Poitier movie: bandit says, "Maid is coming out with a message" Kills her; "get the message?" Comes out with hostage under a blanket, so can't be shot; kills hostage to warn cop not to gamble next time;

protection from invading regime that will torture, enslave, change identity;

nuclear war as killing more people slowly and tortuously than quickly. (See comments in Journal for the Protection of All Beings, Ginsburg).

--desire to create a crisis (Khomeini to Bani Sadr, 1980; in Honegger)...to get radical concessions in a spirit of desperation;

--general evocation of desperation, fear, "threat," to make people obedient, receptive to reckless/criminal/immoral/ radical solutions, to the initiatives of authority, to autocratic power;

--This week: assassination of PLO #2, why? (Do Israelis really believe he was cause of bus attack? or the opposite; quite possible they think he was a moderating influence, just as Arafat is; they hope to drive the PLO to terrorism, instead of to moderate political leadership; to get Palestinians to shoot, rather than to throw rocks (they are arming David with guns instead of a slingshot): by angering them, causing unreflective retaliation; and by eliminating a possibly moderating influence (as Schneider was removed in Chile, and Yani in Indonesia, with Left to be blamed. Like effect of killing Martin Luther King; or perhaps, this time, Jackson. Same strategy as driving the PLO out of Lebanon and trying to eliminate influence of Arafat).